



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 18, 2020

Agenda Item: Woods Ranch WMA Lincoln Electric Powerline Easement Transfer, Region 1

Action Needed: Endorsement **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

Background

The Wood's Ranch Wildlife Management Area (WRWMA) is 1,474 acres in size and located 5.5 miles north of Eureka, Montana. On November 27, 2019, a major wind event hit northwest Montana, resulting in significant blowdown across the west side of Whitefish Range and affecting the WRWMA. Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc. currently holds a right-of-way easement to maintain approximately 2 miles of above ground powerline on the WRWMA, to supply power to adjacent landowners east and west of the WRWMA. During the wind event, approximately 0.86 miles of power line was severely impacted by blowdown, prompting Lincoln Electric staff to approach FWP about possibly altering the existing utility easement by burying a portion of the line underground.

FWP is seeking preliminary approval by the Commission to evaluate transferring a portion of the existing above-ground power line easement to a below ground line paralleling existing roads on the WMA. If approved, approximately 0.86 miles of above ground line would be removed from the WMA, by Lincoln Electric, and replaced with 0.65 miles of below ground power line adjacent to existing roads. The existing easement would be modified to reflect these changes.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Upon endorsement by the Commission, FWP would prepare a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review. FWP would incorporate public input into a final EA and perform due diligence as necessary prior to bringing a recommendation to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for final approval in August 2020.

Alternatives and Analysis

No action would result in no change to the current easement held by Lincoln Electric Cooperative Inc. The above-ground lines would remain in place and continue to be maintained by Lincoln Electric staff and equipment throughout the year.

FWP will evaluate factors associated with the easement transfer including the ecological, economic and social consequences. Transferring the lines to below ground has the potential to effect (positively or negatively), soils, watersheds, wildlife movement, and susceptibility to wildfire.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission provide preliminary endorsement, which would allow FWP to develop a more detailed proposal and conduct public involvement, to determine if a transfer of Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc. power lines and associated easement is appropriate on the WRWMA.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission to endorse further analysis and public comment of the Lincoln Electric Cooperative Power Line Easement transfer on the Woods Ranch Wildlife Management Area.